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1981 Census of Canada

LANGUAGE IN CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

The various native groups were speaking their own languages long before the first Europeans arrived in Canada. The earliest European settlers brought French and English to what are now the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Ontario. During the late nineteenth century, Canada attracted immigrants from Central and Northern Europe, who spoke such languages as German, Ukrainian and Norwegian. Many of these immigrants settled in the West, while others who came later were drawn to Eastern cities. Canada continues to add to its linguistic profile as new immigrants arrive from such countries as India, China and Vietnam.

This rich history is reflected today. While the two official languages are English and French, over 3 million Canadians have another language as mother tongue.* In 1981, more than 150 newspapers and magazines were published in close to 40 different languages in Canada. Language legislation and policies on multiculturalism help foster this linguistic diversity.

Results of the 1981 Census show that:

- English is the mother tongue of 6 out of every 10 people in Canada.
- A quarter of the Canadian population is of French mother tongue, 85% of whom live in Quebec.
- In the Prairie provinces and British Columbia, German, not French is the second most common mother tongue, while in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, native languages stand second.

- More than 2 million people speak at home a language that differs from their mother tongue.
- Most of these people have a mother tongue other than English or French. Even in Quebec, they more often choose English over French.
- Close to 4 million Canadians are bilingual.
- Bilingualism is much more common among those whose mother tongue is French than among the English.
- However, bilingualism is increasing at a faster pace among the English than among the French.

This report is about language in Canada.** It tells where the various linguistic groups are located, examines language mobility, that is, the tendency of persons to speak at home a language that differs from their mother tongue, and looks at bilingual Canadians to see who and where they are.

* The following terms are synonymous and refer to the same entity: non-official languages group; people with non-official languages as mother tongue; people with mother tongues other than English or French; people whose mother tongue is neither English nor French. In the tables and charts the term "other" is also used.

** While the 1971 Census data include inmates, their exclusion from some of the figures shown in this report does not modify the trends presented. Sample data were collected from one-third of Canadians in 1971 and from one-fifth in 1981.

HOW LARGE ARE CANADA'S LANGUAGE GROUPS AND WHERE ARE THEY LOCATED?

Language is stamped on the map of Canada according to historical settlement patterns. Members of the same ethnic group often moved into one area creating pockets where their own language flourished. Thus, the language picture differs greatly from region to region.

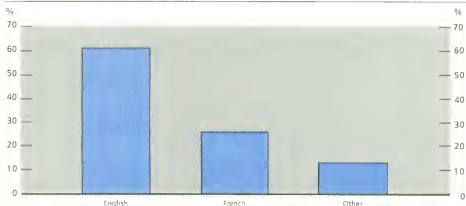
English Is the Mother Tongue of Most Canadians

English is the language first learned in childhood and still understood by 14.8 million or 6 out of 10 Canadians. One-quarter of the population, 6.2 million, claim French as their mother tongue, while the remaining 3.2 million cite another language.

English is the mother tongue of the majority in every province except Quebec. It is most prevalent in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.

Chart 1

Percentage Distribution by Mother Tongue of the Population, Canada, 1981



Source: 1981 Census of Canada

French Mother Tongue Is Concentrated in Quebec

Quebec represents just over a quarter of Canada's population, but 8 out of 10 Canadians whose mother tongue is French live in that province.

Outside Quebec, New Brunswick has the highest proportion of residents whose mother tongue is French. 1 out of 3. In every other province, the proportion is less than 6%. However, the people in Ontario who have French as their mother tongue outnumber their New Brunswick counterparts by 2 to 1.

The English Mother Tongue Group Has Declined in Quebec

Between 1971 and 1981, the number of Quebecers with English mother tongue decreased by approximately 10%. In 1971, they constituted 13% of the province's population while a decade later, 11% of Quebecers (just over 700,000 persons) reported English as their mother tongue. During the same period, the proportion of the French mother tongue group increased from 81% to 82% and the non-official languages group from 6% to 7%.

Table 1

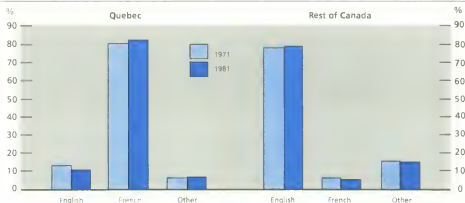
Percentage Distribution by Mother Tongue of the Population, Provinces and Territories, 1981

Mother tongue	Nfld.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Yukon	N.W.T.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English	98.8	94.0	93.6	65.1	10.9	77.3	71.7	79.7	81.1	81.9	87.4	54.1
French	0.5	4.9	4.2	33.6	82.4	5.5	5.1	2.6	2.8	1.6	2.3	2.7
Other	0.7	1.1	2.2	1.2	6.7	17.2	23.1	17.7	16.2	16.5	10.3	43.2

Source: 1981 Census of Canada

Chart 2

Percentage Distribution by Mother Tongue of the Population, Quebec and the Rest of Canada, 1971 and 1981



Source: 1971 Census of Canada, unpublished data
1981 Census of Canada

The French Mother Tongue Population Grew More Slowly than the Other Language Groups

In the seventies, the French mother tongue population of Canada increased about half as rapidly as the other language groups. While the English mother tongue population was approximately 15% larger in 1981 than ten years earlier and the non-official languages group 13% larger at the end of the decade, the French population rose by 8% during the same period.

Growth of the French mother tongue population in Canada occurred mostly in Quebec. The French population of this province grew by 9% compared with less than 2% in the rest of Canada.

After English and French, the Top Five Mother Tongues Are Italian, German, Ukrainian, Chinese and Portuguese

Italian and German are each the mother tongue of more than half a million people, while Ukrainian and Chinese account for another quarter million apiece. Portuguese is the mother tongue of about 166,000 persons. These five languages represent more than half the people whose mother tongue is a non-official language.

People With Mother Tongues Other than English or French Cluster in Certain Provinces

Nearly half of the people with mother tongues other than English or French live in Ontario. Next in line are British Columbia and Quebec, each home to about one-seventh of this group. Very few live in the Atlantic region.

As a proportion of Canada's total population, people with mother tongues other than English or French represent 13%. The proportion in each region ranges from a low of just over 1% in the Atlantic region to highs of 18% in the Prairie provinces and 32% in the territories.

The Mother Tongue of Most Native People Is Not a Native Language

English is the mother tongue of 6 out of 10 of Canada's native people. Just 3 in 10 claim a native mother tongue. Of these, Cree is by far the most prevalent. Ojibway and Inuktitut rank a distant second and third.

Table 2

Number and Percentage of the Population With Mother Tongues Other than English or French, by Region, 1981

Persons with mother tongues other than English or French	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	British Columbia	Territories	Canada
Number (000's)	33	425	1,471	775	450	22	3,176
Percentage of total population	1.5	6.6	17.1	18.3	16.4	32.0	13.0

Source: 1981 Census of Canada.

Table 3

Percentage Distribution by Mother Tongue of Native People, Canada, 1981

Mother tongue	%
Total	100.0
Total native languages	28.7
Algonkian languages	20.2
Cree	13.4
Ojibway	4.0
Other Algonkian	2.8
Athapaskan languages	2.4
Inuktitut	3.8
Iroquoian languages	1.2
Other native languages	1.1
English	62.4
French	4.6
Other	4.3

Source: 1981 Census of Canada.

In the West and the North, People With a Non-official Language as Mother Tongue Outnumber the French

One in 4 Manitoba residents claims a mother tongue other than English or French. The proportion in the other Western provinces is 1 in 6.

In the West, non-official languages tend to be European. In the Prairie provinces and British Columbia, German is the second most common mother tongue. Ukrainian ranks third in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, while in British Columbia, Chinese is third.

In the Yukon and Northwest Territories, native languages stand second. They account for 4 out of 10 persons in the Northwest Territories.

Most People Whose Mother Tongue Is Neither English Nor French Live in Large Cities

More than half of those with mother tongues other than English or French live in five large cities: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Edmonton and Winnipeg. Toronto alone accounts for more than a quarter of the total.

Toronto is also the city with the largest proportion of inhabitants whose mother tongue is not an official language - about 1 in 3. Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton and Hamilton follow with 1 in 5.

In Brief

- English is the mother tongue of most Canadians, except in Quebec where French predominates. French is also significant in New Brunswick.
- Between 1971 and 1981, the English mother tongue population has decreased in Quebec, while the French mother tongue group in the rest of Canada has remained about the same size.
- In the West and the North, people with a non-official language as mother tongue outnumber the French. In the West, these languages tend to be European, while in the North, native languages are more common.
- The top five non-official languages reported as mother tongue are Italian, German, Ukrainian, Chinese and Portuguese. More than half of those with mother tongues other than English or French live in five large cities: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Edmonton and Winnipeg.

Chart 3

Top Three Mother Tongues in Each Province and Territory, 1981

Largest mother tongue group



Second largest mother tongue group



Third largest mother tongue group



Source: 1981 Census of Canada

DO CANADIANS RETAIN THEIR MOTHER TONGUE OR ADOPT ANOTHER LANGUAGE?

The census of population asks Canadians about their mother tongue and the language they speak most often at home. By examining the responses to these questions, we can determine if people tend to retain their mother tongue or adopt another language.

In fact, the language spoken most often at home is a very good indicator of the degree to which a language is being retained. It determines, in most cases, the language passed from one generation to the other, since the language that the parents use in the home usually becomes the mother tongue of the children.

A comparison of the mother tongue and home language data should therefore enrich our knowledge of the language situation in Canada. It shows a strong attraction of English over the other languages in all regions of Canada, even in Quebec. While 61% of Canadians report English as their mother tongue, 68% speak this language most often at home. Likewise, close to 13% of Quebecers use English at home, while the English mother tongue group constitutes 11% of the population.

It is at the expense of the non-official languages that English gains most. While 13% of Canadians report a mother tongue other than English or French, 7% speak at home a non-official language. In Quebec, the figures drop from 7% to 5%.

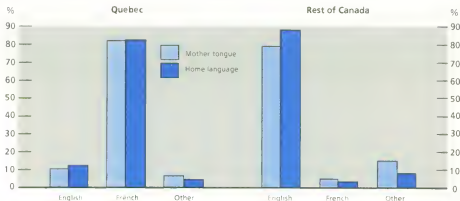
The French group maintains its position in Quebec, but everywhere else the proportion speaking French at home is lower than the proportion with French as a mother tongue, with significant variations from one province to the other.

More than 2 Million People Have a Home Language Different from Their Mother Tongue

About 1 person in 10 does not speak at home the first language learned in childhood. This phenomenon is often referred to as language mobility. More precisely, it is considered that a person reporting different languages to the two census questions has made a language shift or a language transfer, while an identical response to the mother tongue and home language questions indicates a retention of that language.*

* Such "shifts" do not, in all cases, necessarily mean that the mother tongue has been abandoned. It is possible that the mother tongue is still spoken in the home but is not the language spoken most often, or that the language used at work or for social activities is in fact the first language learned in childhood. Also, although census questions on both mother tongue and home language called for single responses, some people specified more than one. In 1981, less than 3% of respondents provided more than one language to the mother tongue question; a similar percentage of respondents provided multiple home languages. These replies were reduced to single responses during data processing. The analysis and interpretation of these cases are particularly difficult. However, the trends presented in this report are not significantly affected by these processing procedures.

Percentage Distribution by Mother Tongue and Home Language of the Population, Quebec and the Rest of Canada, 1981



Source: 1981 Census of Canada

The Tendency to Shift from One Language to Another Differs by Mother Tongue

Of the 2 million people who experienced a language shift, 70% have mother tongues other than English or French. Twenty per cent switched from French, and just 10% from English.

People whose mother tongue is English are least likely to make a shift. Fewer than 2 out of 100 use a different language at home. The proportion among the French mother tongue group is higher - 7 out of 100 - but nowhere near the proportion of people with mother tongues other than English or French.

Half of Those With Mother Tongues Other than English or French Speak English at Home

In every province except Quebec, those with a mother tongue other than English or French are as likely to shift to English for use at home as they are to retain their first language. In Quebec, they are less inclined to change. Two-thirds retain their mother tongue, about one-quarter

speak English at home, and just one-tenth use French.

Language mobility, that is, the tendency of persons to speak at home a language that differs from their mother tongue, can be analyzed by making an analogy with territorial migration. There is, at all times, a constant exchange of persons between two geographical units. First, we usually want to know the number of moves between the entities, but also to determine the net migration effect, that is, to determine if more individuals have left an area than have entered it. We have then shown, by establishing if a particular unit wins or loses persons by this process, how the migration phenomenon contributes to the growth of a population.

Likewise for language mobility. In a country as heterogeneous as Canada, one would certainly expect to encounter exchanges between language groups. However, the volume of the exchanges are far from being of the same magnitude in all directions. In fact, certain groups gain more than others in the process. The language continuity index is a good indicator of the effect of

language mobility on the growth of various groups across the country. It shows which language groups are gaining and which are losing.

This index is obtained by calculating the ratio of persons speaking a particular language at home to the number of individuals who have the same language as mother tongue. For example, the index for English in Canada is tabulated by dividing 16,425,905 (home language) by 14,750,495 (mother tongue). It gives 1.114 (or 111.4%).

Language Mobility Favours the English Group ...

Everywhere in Canada, language mobility favours the English group. A value superior to 100% indicates that a unit recruits more members than it loses. For English this value ranges from a low of 100.5% in Newfoundland to a high of 119.9% in Manitoba. Even in Quebec where, from 1971 to 1981, the English group lost over 10% of its members, linguistic mobility favours this group: 116.4%.

... But Not the Minority Languages

Except for the English mother tongue group in Quebec, the minority languages are not maintaining their position. With varying degrees from one province to the other, language mobility plays against them. A value inferior to 100% indicates a loss; the lower the value, the more severe the disadvantage. For the non-official languages, the loss is least in the Northwest Territories and Quebec: the index is slightly over 80% in the Northwest Territories and just over 70% in Quebec.

In Quebec, French Neither Gains Nor Loses in its Exchanges With Other Languages

There is practically the same number of Quebecers who speak French at home as those of French mother tongue. The French language maintains its position in this province only. It loses slightly in New Brunswick (93%), more severely in Ontario (just over 70%) and even more in the rest of Canada.

Table 4

Language Continuity Index for English, French and Non-official Languages Considered as One Category, Canada and Provinces, 1981

	English	French	Other
	%	%	%
Canada	111.4	95.9	54.9
Newfoundland	100.5	67.5	58.7
Prince Edward Island	102.7	63.0	32.1
Nova Scotia	102.7	68.5	46.5
New Brunswick	104.4	93.4	49.6
Quebec	116.4	100.2	71.2
Ontario	111.2	71.2	58.9
Manitoba	119.9	59.7	47.1
Saskatchewan	116.4	39.8	34.9
Alberta	113.1	48.5	43.2
British Columbia	112.0	34.6	47.1
Yukon	110.0	44.2	28.0
Northwest Territories	117.4	51.2	81.2

Source: 1981 Census of Canada.

Table 5

Language Continuity Index for Selected Non-official Languages, Canada and Provinces, 1981

	Italian	German	Ukrainian	Chinese	Portu- guese	Nether- landic lan- guages	Aborig- inal lan- guages	Polish	Greek
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Canada	68.6	31.7	33.1	83.5	79.5	16.8	78.0	43.7	77.0
Newfoundland	37.5	26.9	33.3	84.8	65.8	-	58.5	-	50.0
Prince Edward Island	60.0	24.1	50.0	69.0	55.6	31.6	-	-	-
Nova Scotia	33.5	24.4	14.2	68.4	62.3	10.9	90.5	24.0	78.9
New Brunswick	44.0	31.5	27.6	81.8	83.8	17.6	85.0	34.3	59.6
Quebec	75.1	36.5	54.9	84.3	82.2	23.8	88.0	50.3	85.8
Ontario	69.1	34.2	41.6	86.1	81.1	15.8	76.0	48.2	74.0
Manitoba	59.3	42.5	34.0	85.9	78.2	20.5	78.8	34.7	67.4
Saskatchewan	43.8	21.9	32.4	76.1	57.0	16.5	76.6	23.2	67.2
Alberta	51.8	30.4	26.0	85.7	70.8	16.2	70.5	36.3	62.3
British Columbia	48.4	25.0	17.9	80.1	66.4	17.9	47.0	31.6	60.4
Yukon	16.6	22.4	7.0	78.6	-	-	27.3	12.5	100.0
Northwest Territories	69.6	12.2	7.1	85.7	60.0	9.5	85.6	22.2	44.4

Source: 1981 Census of Canada.

Of the 10 Largest Non-official Languages, Chinese Loses the Least

The continuity index for the Chinese language in Canada is close to 84%, the highest among the 10 largest mother tongue groups in the country, apart from English or French. It is followed by Portuguese (80%), aboriginal languages (78%), Greek (77%) and Italian (69%). German and Ukrainian have significantly lower values (32% and 33%).

In Brief

- More than 2 million people have a home language different from their mother tongue.
- Language mobility favours the English group but not the minority languages.
- In Quebec, French neither gains nor loses in its exchanges with other languages. It loses slightly in New Brunswick, more severely in Ontario and even more in the rest of Canada.

ARE CANADIANS BECOMING MORE BILINGUAL?

Official bilingualism is the ability to speak both English and French. Many Canadians are bilingual, or even multilingual, in that they can speak more than one language. Those who know English and French are considered "officially" bilingual.

Historically, people with French as their mother tongue were more likely to be bilingual than their English counterparts. This is still true, but there are signs of change.

Bilingualism Is Increasing

The 1981 Census shows that 16 million people, two-thirds of the population, can speak only English, and 4 million or one-sixth, only French. Just 291,000 cannot speak either official language. The remaining 3.7 million can speak both official languages.

In 1981, English-French bilinguals represented 15% of the total population, an increase from 13% ten years ago and 12% twenty years ago.

While Canada's population grew just 12% in the last decade, the number of people who are bilingual rose at more than twice this rate: 27.0%.

The French Are Much More Likely to Be Bilingual than the English

About one-third of those whose mother tongue is French are bilingual in contrast to just 8% of the English.

Bilingualism Is Most Prevalent in Quebec

A third of Quebec's population can speak both official languages. The rate is also high in New Brunswick where more than one-quarter are bilingual.

Quebec is home to more than half of all bilingual Canadians. Another quarter live in Ontario.

Half the English in Quebec Are Bilingual

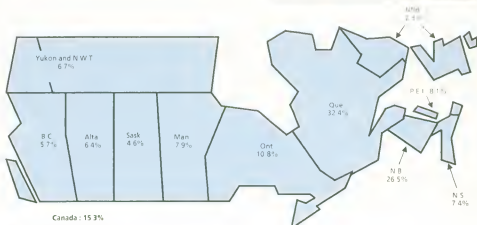
Of the 1.1 million bilinguals whose mother tongue is English, 371,000 live in Quebec, but even more - 436,000 - live in Ontario. However, the rate of bilingualism for the English in Quebec is more than 50%, as opposed to 7% for those in Ontario.

Bilingualism Is Related to Proximity to Quebec

For the English, as distance from Quebec grows, the rate of bilingualism drops. For the French, distance from Quebec is related to increases in bilingualism. In Quebec itself, more than one-quarter of the French are bilingual.

Bilingualism is less common among the English in Quebec than among the French in the rest of Canada. In every other province except New Brunswick, about 1 person in 14 whose mother tongue is English is bilingual, in contrast to 9 out of 10 whose mother tongue is French.

Bilingual Population as a Percentage of the Total Population, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1981



Source: 1981 Census of Canada

The Greatest Gains in Bilingualism Were Made by the English

Between 1971 and 1981, bilingualism rose in every province. Over half the gain has been among people whose mother tongue is English. The number of bilingual people among them increased by more than 407,000 or 58%. At the same time, the total number whose mother tongue was English rose just 15%.

The number of people who are bilingual among the French mother tongue group increased by 273,000 or 14%. This is double the 7% rate of growth of the French mother tongue population.

Table 6

Bilingual Population as a Percentage of the English and French Mother Tongue Groups, Provinces and Territories, 1981

Mother tongue group	Nfld.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Yukon	N.W.T.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English	1.8	4.0	3.7	8.9	53.4	6.6	3.9	2.5	4.3	4.3	6.2	5.6
French	83.8	87.2	89.6	60.8	28.7	84.0	88.6	86.6	85.4	85.1	88.6	85.4

Source: 1981 Census of Canada

More than Half the English in Quebec Are Bilingual

Despite the 90,000 drop in Quebec's English mother tongue group, the number who are bilingual rose from 288,000 in 1971 to 371,000 in 1981. This meant that bilingualism among the English mother tongue group in Quebec rose from 37% to 53%.

The numerical increase in bilingualism among Quebec's French mother tongue group was much greater, totalling more than a quarter of a million. However, the proportion who are bilingual increased only slightly from 26% to 29%.

The Most Spectacular Increase in Bilingualism Was Made by the English Outside Quebec

Although just over 5% of the English outside Quebec are bilingual, their numbers have risen by 78% in the last decade. This compares with a 29% increase in the number of bilingual persons with English mother tongue in Quebec.

Among the English, the Young Are More Bilingual

Ten per cent of the English mother tongue group aged 15-29 are bilingual. For those aged 30 or older, the figure falls to 7%.

Nearly two-thirds of Quebec's young adults whose mother tongue is English speak both official languages. Those in New Brunswick and Ontario rank second, with one-tenth claiming bilingualism. At the other end of the scale is Newfoundland where the proportion drops to 3 in 100.

Among the French, Bilingualism Is Slightly More Common for Older Age Groups

In most provinces, among persons whose mother tongue is French, the age 30 or over group has a marginally higher rate of bilingualism than the 15-29-year olds. Outside Quebec and New Brunswick, about 9 out of 10 who were 30 years or older reported they were bilingual. In Quebec, the proportion was 4 in 10, and in New Brunswick, 7 in 10.

Montréal and Ottawa-Hull Are the Most Bilingual Metropolitan Areas in Canada

Fully 45% of the residents of Montréal are bilingual. More than half the people whose mother tongue is English are bilingual in contrast to about 4 out of 10 whose mother tongue is French.

The next most bilingual urban region is Ottawa-Hull where 40% of residents speak both languages. The mother tongue breakdown, however, is much different from Montréal. Fewer than a quarter of the English are bilingual, as opposed to 71% of those whose mother tongue is French.

People With Mother Tongues Other than English or French Have a Higher Rate of Bilingualism than the English

Just 8% of the people whose mother tongue is English can also speak French, compared with 10% of those with a mother tongue other than English or French who are able to speak both official languages. However, close to 80% of the non-official languages group claim English as their sole official language, while only 2% cite French.

In Quebec, nearly half of those with mother tongues other than English or French are bilingual. One-quarter report English as their sole official language; one-sixth report only French. Here, 1 in 10 cannot speak either language, the highest percentage in any province.

In Brief

- Bilingualism is increasing slowly, the largest gains being made by young people whose mother tongue is English. Bilingualism is growing fastest among the English outside Quebec.
- Proximity to Quebec is related to the degree of bilingualism. Half of Canada's bilingual population live in Quebec and another quarter in Ontario. As distance from Quebec increases, bilingualism drops for those with English as their mother tongue but increases for the French.

CONCLUSION

Both English and French are strong in the regions where they predominate. Excluding Quebec, virtually everyone who first learned English continues to use it at home. In Quebec, and to a large extent, New Brunswick, the same is true for the French. However, outside of these two provinces, the shift from French to English is quite extensive.

At the national level, bilingualism is spreading. As distance from Quebec increases, the degree of bilingualism among those with French as their mother tongue grows, while bilingualism among the English diminishes. A large proportion of English Quebecers are bilingual. In the rest of Canada, the French mother tongue group is highly bilingual.

Half the people with mother tongues other than English or French still use them at home. For those who do switch, the attraction of English far exceeds that of French.

History has set the language patterns in Canada. As the source countries of immigration change, so do languages. Linguistic diversity is likely to persist so long as there are new immigrants to Canada and the groups already here maintain interest in their mother tongue.

Canada has taken a census of population every ten years from 1851 and every five years from 1956. The last census was taken on June 3, 1981. The census data constitute the most important single source of information on the population of Canada by many geographic areas from the national and provincial levels down to smaller groups such as cities, towns and municipalities. These data include: information on the number of people who live in Canada; their characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, language, educational level and occupation; number and types of families; and types of dwellings. Census information is used for a variety of purposes by private individuals, governments at all levels, educational institutions, business people and other organizations.

As part of a program to supplement 1981 Census statistical reports, a special series of popular studies has been undertaken on selected topics of public interest. Each study is a description of major trends and patterns. The data used are from the 1981 Census and other relevant sources. This series is designed for use at the high school and community college levels. However, it could also be of interest to the general public.

LANGUAGE IN CANADA is one of the reports in this series. It brings together under one cover highlights of information about the language situation of the population. Other studies in the series are being published at about the same time or within the next few months.

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